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SUBJECT: USAID OFFICIAL DISCUSSES DPRK FOOD SITUATION WITH
ROK GOVERNMENT AND NGO'S

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Visiting USAID official Jon Brause met with a range of ROKG officials and NGO and other agency leaders involved in assistance to the DPRK, February 12-16. Brause articulated the USG position on the upcoming WFP proposal for Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations (PRRO) in the DPRK, and sought information on the current humanitarian situation in North Korea. ROKG officials understood our concerns about the WFP proposal and agreed that a cooperative effort during next week's Executive Board meeting would be best. The consensus among those consulted is that the worst of the food crisis is indeed over, but there are still areas of food insecurity that would benefit from a well targeted WFP activity. End Summary.

ROKG: DONOR COORDINATION WELCOME, BUT NOT BINDING

2. (SBU) USAID DCHA/PPM Office Director Jon Brause met with South Korean officials at the director general level from the Ministry of Unification (MOU) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT). While it is MOFAT who represents the ROK government on issues dealing with WFP, South Korea's delivery of food to the North is controlled by the MOU.

3. (SBU) Brause explained to each of his interlocutors that while the USG supported the presence of international organizations in North Korea, the proposed WFP Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) plan for the DPRK lacked critical operational details related to access and monitoring, which will prevent the USG from supporting the activity at the Executive Board meeting next week. Brause stressed, however, that we were not rejecting the proposal, and that we hoped to coordinate a response for the Executive Board meeting that would encourage WFP to work with the DPRK to add detail to the proposal, strengthen it and ultimately resubmit it to the Board. The ROKG officials took this on board, but said that the South Korean government had not yet formally decided what stance to take at the Executive Board meeting. They expected, however, that the ROK would take a very low profile in interventions, so as not to anger the DPRK.

4. (SBU) More generally, Brause also discussed with ministry

officials the detrimental impact ROK bilateral assistance could have on the humanitarian efforts of other donors and international organizations, if it is perceived by the North as obviating any role for other donor organizations. While recognizing the South Korean government's significant ability to provide large-scale economic assistance to the DPRK, Brause stressed that the ROKG must make a greater effort to ensure that this bilateral assistance does not impede the ability of the donor community to support activities with a strong humanitarian focus.

15. (SBU) In response, the ROKG officials made no specific commitments, but assured Brause that they wanted to work with the United States to develop a common humanitarian approach. They added that the South Korean government also valued the continued presence of international organizations in the DPRK. In the final analysis, the ministry officials did not seem prepared to consider any significant modifications to their bilateral assistance to the DPRK. They did, however, concede that a broader humanitarian presence in the DPRK was to South Korea's advantage, and that more visible support to multilateral humanitarian activities was necessary.

NGO's: MOVING TO "DEVELOP" ASSISTANCE, STUCK NEAR PYONGYANG

16. (SBU) Brause also met with several NGO's that currently have projects in North Korea. Among that sample, the consensus seemed to be that a large majority of the North Korean populace is no longer experiencing a food crisis situation. At the same time, areas further away from Pyongyang -- in particular mountainous areas and the Northeast -- probably receive significantly less food,

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resulting in continued pockets of food insecurity in these regions. Most NGO's agreed that even if WFP were to begin a new program, access to the vulnerable areas could not be expected.

17. (U) While some NGO's continue to operate some variant of a feeding program, it is clear that most are moving to a model that could be more accurately described as "development-oriented." For instance, one South Korean NGO working in the North is providing raw materials for the manufacture of tillers and automated rice-planting machines, which are then distributed to farming cooperatives. Another NGO that has identified basic childhood diseases as a critical problem is refurbishing the Pyongyang Children's Hospital and building a manufacturing plant for intravenous solutions.

18. (SBU) Most of the NGO activities are grass-root interventions that are too small to have a systemic impact. It is also clear that most of the NGO activities described are carried out in and around Pyongyang. Little if any NGO work seems to be allowed in the central and northeastern sections of the country, which are universally recognized as the most in need of assistance.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Brause's consultations with the ROKG on the humanitarian situation in the DPRK highlighted the need to develop a shared approach to assistance in the DPRK. The willingness of the USG to discuss our planned position on the new WFP PRRO for the DPRK in advance of the Executive Board meeting helped ensure that the ROKG understood that our actions were an effort to strengthen humanitarian response in the DPRK, rather than end it. Additional, regular consultations with the ROKG on humanitarian and developmental activities in the DPRK could further our mutual goals in that area.

110. (U) USAID Brause cleared this message.

VERSHBOW